"Multiplying Division":

A Figural Reading of the Story of the Levite's Concubine (Judges 19-21)

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Dedicated to Dr. Ross Shaw
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Teacher, Colleague, Friend

Introduction

I propose this evening to carry out a figural reading of the story of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19–21, which prompts an immediate question: Why this text at this time? Since the passage does not appear in any lectionary, has never been considered crucial for any aspect of Christian thought, is avoided in Sunday School, and would never be chosen by any sane preacher, its selection requires ample justification. Given the Bible's sumptuous resources, why call attention to an episode so darkly disturbing that its obscurity is more blessing than bane?[1]

I begin my answer with another question: Why is this text so unfamiliar? After all, once read, the story is impossible to forget. How can we suppress the image of a brutal gang rape after which the victim is dismembered by her husband who did not lift a finger in her behalf and was complicitous in her torture? Even to skim this account is to remember it. Perhaps the story has traumatized the Church into a collective repression. Still, the story manages to insert itself. It is found after all as part of *Former Prophets* in the Hebrew textual tradition. With the Latter Prophets, this constitutes one of the Bible's most prominent sections.[2] How has such an unforgettable prophetic story become so obscure?

Keep in mind that the story is part of a book which features famous characters like Deborah, Gideon and Samson. Indeed, Judges plays a vital role in the biblical epic, following Joshua and preceding Samuel. Not only that, absent the story of the Levite's concubine, the final part of Judges loses a key transitional passage. Since typically the beginning and ending of books are particularly significant, Judges 19–21 should *a priori* get close scrutiny as the final installment of a strategically situated narrative. Additionally, since this story immediately precedes one in which Hannah prepares the way for her son Samuel to replace priestly with prophetic ministry and in which Israel for the first time demands a king, the last three chapters of Judges ought not be dismissed as insconsequential (1 Samuel 1—7; 8).[3]

As a whole, Judges is a counterpoint to the Book of Joshua, which praises an obedient Israel

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[1]Trible famously included this text among her "texts of terror." See Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary–Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Overtures to Biblical Theology, 13; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984): 65–91.

[2]The Former Prophets consists of Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, excluding Ruth (Ruth is between Judges and 1 Samuel in the Greek traditions of the Jewish Bible). The Latter Prophets is made up of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve (i.e., the so-called Minor Prophets).

[3]See Frank Anthony Spina, "Eli's Seat: The Transition from Priest to Prophet in 1 Samuel 1–4," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 62 (1994): 67–75 [reprinted in J. Cheryl Exum, ed., *The Historical Books: A Sheffield Reader* (The Biblical Seminar, 40; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997: 98–106]. The same may be said of the story recounted in Judges 17–18. Both these stories go together to make the transition to Samuel. Most critical scholars have viewed the last five chapters of Judges as an appendix and not in any way integral to the book as a whole. See George F. Moore *Judges* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1895): 365.

(Josh 24:31). Judges, though, excoriates Israel for habitual disobedience (Jud 2:1–5).[4] Israel's prodicality is emphasized by the judges themselves, who progressively become more immoral. But the last two stories in Judges are not about judges per se, which makes them literarily conspicuous. As such, it takes a concerted and conscious effort to bypass the story of the Levite's concubine.[5] Though unquestionably disturbing, our own cultural and theological blinders are to blame, for we have averted our eyes from the narrative not because of its positioning, which is strategic, but because of its content, which is repugnant.

This brings us back to our original question: Why would a story about infidelity, family disfunctionality, hospitality which is either suffocatingly excessive or nonexistent, an unprincipled husband whose cruelty defies description, a ruthless gang rape, internecine war, and a level of sin that accents stupidity as much as perversion play such a crucial role standing as it does between Judges and Samuel? The answer is that the story features *Israel* in a particular light. But this Israel is presented not as an ancient Near Eastern people whose mysogyny was typical for the times or as a socio-political entity which was more violence prone than most. The Israel central to this story is none other than the *Israel of God*, the people whose ancestors YHWH specifically elected for the purpose of redeeming, reconciling, and restoring the created order (see Gen 12:1-3). What is related in the concubine story would have sullied the reputation of even the most barbarous of ancient peoples, but encountering it as part of Israel's story renders it all but inexplicable, for the Israel in this narrative is first and foremost God's elect.

Perhaps focussing on Israel still gives us a measure of comfortable distance. Surely Israel is *them*, not *us*. But may Christians so easily make that claim? The answer would seem to be resoundingly negative if we take at all seriously that Christian Scripture consists of the Old and New Testaments. Christians have to deal with the reality that the story of the Levite's concubine is their story as long as it is part of the sacred canon. To be sure, almost from the beginnings of the Christian Church efforts have been made to remove outright or at least deauthorize parts of the Old Testament. Discarding or ignoring a story like this is much easier than dealing with it. But the Church has steadfastly resisted all such attempts to neutralizing the Old Testament, at least formally. Christians still confess it as Christian Scripture. That should not be a problem—it was Jesus' Scripture too. So, we may struggle with this story, despise it, be shocked by it, get frustrated trying to interpret it, or hope fervently that it will eventually die from the studied neglect to which we have subjected it. Yet, our efforts notwithstanding, it is still there, concluding Judges and preparing us for Samuel. As a story about Israel, it remains an aspect of our story.

At the same time, this story is about Israel from a singular perspective. These three chapters present Israel as divided, increasingly divided, hopelessly divided. As we shall see, once there is division, it grows exponentially. In short, once begun, the divisions multiply. To the extent that we are the least bit interested in God's chosen people, this story cannot help but capture our attention.

In theological terms, Israel as the elect people of God, the Kingdom of God announced by John and embodied by Jesus the Christ, and the Church which is the Body of Christ as engendered and sustained by the Holy Spirit, are organically related to each other. For that reason, any story dealing with Israel is vital and indispensable to the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Expressing the issue in these terms is another factor in my choice of this text on this occasion. On this point I further contextualize this story by calling attention briefly to one of Seattle Pacific University's descriptors: Ecumenical.

Ecumenical is, of course, part of our quadrilateral, along with Evangelical, Wesleyan, and Orthodox. These four terms are helpful for situating this University historically and theologically, but they also speak to the dynamism, growth, and maturity of the institution. In my judgment, for all the imprecision that attaches to each of these terms, they provide an excellent start at self-identification. At the same time, I venture to say that for most of our internal and external constituents, the loss of the ecumenical descriptor would be the least lamented. After all, *Ecumenical* was the last to be added, has the least

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[4]Israel's sinful ways are expressed through a literary pattern: (1) Israel does evil; (2) YHWH gives them over to an enemy; (3) the people "cry out"; (4) YHWH raises up a deliverer ("judge"); (5) the deliverer rescues the people; (6) Israel "rests" until the next sin is committed.

[5]The same may be said for Judges 17—18.

purchase among institutions in our orbit, and remains arguably the most controversial descriptor. It is widely rumored that this was the President's most difficult sell.

But why should this be? The easy answer, I suppose, is that the modern ecumenical movement has been largely associated with mainline liberal Protestantism. Churches which call themselves evangelical have therefore kept ecumenism at arm's length. The logic is simple: *ecumeni*sm cannot be a positive development given the folk who have historically promoted it.

But is that cogent reasoning on the part of those who consider themselves theologically conservative? Theologically and historically, *ecumenica*l is a property of the Church as the Body of Christ. *Ecumenical* accents the unity of this body as the "*one*, holy, catholic, and apostolic church." *Ecumenical* underscores that Christians everywhere are brothers and sisters in Christ, making a common confession, serving a common Lord, participating in a common baptism, engaging in a common mission, and meeting most humbly and repentantly at a common table where we share one bread and one cup, which is sacramentally the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. An ecumenical Church is one that is sustained and led in all its parts by the Holy Spirit. Christian unity is not a function of our will, our deliberations, our best efforts to get along, our tolerance, or our commitment to the lowest common theological denominator. Christian unity is a function of being called to be one people from the beginning, as confirmed at Pentecost. We follow that same Spirit in our common lives together, and are taught by that Spirit what it means to live our lives as Christ's body.

Consequently, a divided Church is not only an unecumenical Church, it is a Church in which the Holy Spirit is compromised. If being the Church means being led by the Spirit which Christ promised, what does it say that the community is many rather than one? Does the Spirit foster division? Is Christ divided? These rhetorical questions stress that ecumenism is a pneumatological as well as an ecclesial issue. Consequently, I firmly believe that *ecumenica*l should be seen on a par with the other descriptors. Do we not need to ask ourselves why a divided Church does not shake us to our foundations and prompt the direction of our prayers? Should not our sisters and brothers in Christ be flocking as one to the Lord's table? Alienation and division should never characterize the Church. We should be multiplying loaves and fish, not divisions. Not incidentally, I confess that the tremors that are convulsing the world-wide Anglican communion and threatening still one more schism have contributed to my sense of urgency about this topic.[6]

This brings us back to our story. If I am correct that this story is indeed about "multiplying divisions" in God's elect people, then that cannot help but catch us up short. I repeat, to the extent that Judges 19—21 puts Israel in an unfavorable light, it potentially puts us in an unfavorable light. How is this so? How can Scripture be construed to have such an immediate effect on us? What makes this biblical word so fresh? I contend that the answers to these questions involves figuration.

Now, we should not recoil from *figuration* as though it were a simplistic reversion to pre-modern biblical interpretation without remainder or as though it involves some new methodological alchemy in which only specialists may participate. For the purposes of this lecture, I think it is instructive to think of figuration in three ways.

First, figuration involves the very nature of the biblical text in its canonical form. Properly considered, the text even at its most literal dimension is essentially figural. This is because there is no one to one direct correlation between the text and the God of whom it testifies. Christian Scripture is primarily a "revelatory text" whose language is necessarily metaphoric, parabolic, symbolic, artful, poetic, and imaginative.[7] I use the word *figuration* to capture all these nuances. The biblical tradition is rooted in history, and necessarily so, in the sense that the deity whose story is told participated in space and time in the life of the elect people Israel and incarnationally in Jesus the Christ. However, technical language is inadequate for narrating this story. Critical biblical scholarship picked up on this by demanding that its proponents conduct their study as methodological atheists. But this is only possible if one studies the Bible as a haphazard and arbitrary collection of ancient texts. It is not possible when reading the Bible *as*

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[6]See Ephraim Radner and Philip Turner, *The Fate of Communion: The Agony of Anglicanism and the Future of a Global Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

[7]Sandra Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (2nd ed.; Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999).

Scripture. For the latter, reading Scripture as a witness to divine revelation is requisite. And that is where attention to Scripture's figural make-up is crucial.

Second, figuration comes into play when one realizes that Scripture speaks a fresh word from God to the community that hears it precisely *as Scripture*. The literal meaning is not exhaustive. Already at the level of intratextuality the biblical writers and editors made use of figuration. Linguistic and literary clues are replete in Scripture—they draw our attention to the text's nuance, depth, and multi-valency. These clues prevent an uncontrolled allegorizing of Scripture. Plus, Scripture's figural dimension may be seen in the light of later events which place old texts in a new, different, and brighter light. This is seen, for example, in the New Testament authors' reading their Jewish Scripture in the light of the Jesus event.

Finally, there is an aspect of figuration that is inherently theological. It is based on the conviction that the God who is depicted as acting and speaking throughout the biblical witness is always the same God. From the perspective of the Christian church's rule of faith, this means that we always encounter the same deity in biblical writ. The biblical text is diverse, complex, highly nuanced, and at times apparently disconsonant. Nevertheless, the deity to whom that text refers is one God, not many. For Christians this is the God of Abraham and Sarah, the other ancestors, the God of Israel, and as well the God who was incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, who as the risen and exalted Lord is the second person of the blessed Trinity. From this perspective, figural reading is not one more interpretive strategy among any number of viable options. Figural reading gets at the heart of reading the Bible—the whole Bible—as Christian Scripture. Christopher Seitz has expressed this well:

> Figural reading is . . . historical reading seeking to comprehend the work of God in Christ, in Israel, in the apostolic witness, and in the Holy Spirit's ongoing word to the church, conveyed now through this legacy of Prophet and Apostle, Old and New Testament, the two-testament canon of Christian Scripture.[8]

Being guided by these remarks, let us turn now to the story of the Levite's concubine.

The Levite's Concubine (Judges 19—21)

Setting the Stage

Like a Hollywood movie, our story begins with a screen-flash: "In those days there was no king in Israel" (19:1). At once we prick up our ears, for a variation of this phrase has already occurred in the previous episode (17:6; see Jud 17—18). There the formula is more elaborate: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every one did what was right in their own eyes."[9] The shorter form pops up in 18:1 and 19:1, and the longer statement again in 21:25. As the story unfolds, we are aware that it is a time when there is no monarchy and consequently no controlling moral vision.

The episode proper begins by establishing the cast of characters, their relationships, and their territorial origins. No one is named, but other markers are present. There is "a Levite man," a designation perhaps suggesting status.[10] Yet, the Levite in the immediately preceding story is ambiguously if not negatively portrayed, so we cannot be sure.[11] This particular Levite was traveling somewhere in Ephraim. During his travels he takes for himself a *pîlegeš* or concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. Typically, a concubine is a legitimate marriage partner of a lesser status. But no primary wife is ever mentioned. Before long we will realize that even if we were to infer that her position was inferior to a proper wife, the *pîlegeš* nevertheless does not play to type. For now we have to be content to know that this particular Levite "took for himself" a woman of ambiguous standing from Bethlehem in Judah either while on this trip

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[8]Christopher R. Seitz, "History, Figural History, and Providence in the Dual Witness of Prophet and Apostle," in *Go Figure!: Figuration in Biblical Interpretation* (Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 81; S. D. Walters, ed.; Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2008 [a division of Wipf & Stock publishers]): 6.

[9]The translations are mine. The phrase is: בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם אֵין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ הַיָּשָׁר בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה/bayyāmîm hāhēm ʾên melek bᵉyiśrāʾēl ʾîš hayyāšār bᵉʿênê yaʿăśeh.

[10]Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 66.

[11]Tammy J. Schneider, *Judges* (Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry; David W. Cotter, ed.; Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1985): 247.

or previously (19:1).[12] At the same time, the Levite is the subject of the verb and the concubine is the object, which hints that whatever her relationship is to other co-wives there is little doubt about the pecking order with her husband.

The Separation

That changes abruptly. In the very next narrative breath the woman becomes subject rather than object (19:2). Unfortunately, her verb is hardly flattering: "His concubine committed adultery against him." The operative word here is *zānāh*, which usually signals literally prostituting oneself or figuratively being idolatrous by consorting with other gods. The Levite's concubine appears simply to have been unfaithful. One Greek (Septuagint) tradition reads: "His concubine got angry with him."[13] In my judgment, the verb suggesting untoward sexual behavior is most apt, for reasons that will become clear later.

The woman soon acquires another verb. After betraying her husband, she leaves him to return to her father's house. In most domestic situations reflected in the Old Testament an unfaithful woman would either be punished severely (Gen 38:24) or sent away by the wronged husband. In this case, though the guilty party, she leaves on her own. Even were we to surmise that she does this knowing that staying with her husband could be dangerous, her leaving on her own initiative is completely counter-intuitive.

The Attempt at Reconciliation

Nothing happens for four months (Jud 19:2). In the story's time-frame this notation draws out the effects of the domestic rift. This is more than a quarrel. At the same time, we are prompted to ponder the initial screen-flash about Israel's being without kings at the time. So far we are being told about a marital crisis being experienced by an insignificant, no-name couple, whose extended family is not worth mentioning. What possible relevance could kingship be to that? This biblical soap opera seems rather limited in its consequences, the reference to kingship grandiose. But we shall see.

After all this time, the man reacts. The woman's previous action had the effect of tilting the story a little in that she has taken over as protagonist—when the man acts he is no longer "the Levite" but "her husband" (19:3). Two verbs accent the man's resolve, which the four month hiatus has intensified: "Her husband arose and went after her." Yet, in case we think this is patriarchy reasserting itself, we are surprised if not delighted by the reason given for the man's Hosea-like movement toward his estranged concubine, namely, "to speak to her heart" and bring her back home.[14] The Levite's unexpected journey to win back his woman is matched by her unexpectedly meeting him on the outskirts of her father's residence and escorting him into the house. Should we conclude from this gesture that the woman wili be receptive to her husband's ministrations? Perhaps, but we quickly notice that while the man's intent was to "speak to her heart," no words, not even those of a simple greeting, are exchanged. Their reunion is a silent one. Nevertheless, there are signs of a possibly happy conclusion to the domestic dilemma in that the young woman's father is pleased to receive his son-in-law, though we are not told why (19:3).

In any case, consonant with the father's good mood, celebration follows. However, there is a disquieting undertone to the festivities. For one thing, the verb used to describe the father's offer of

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[12]Ilt is possible that there is a hint of misogyny in the phrase "he took for himself a *pîlegeš*-woman." At the same time, this may simply mean "he married." See Gen 4:19; 1 Chron 2:19; 2 Chron 11:18, which are examples where misogyny is not obviously present. Context is determiniative. See Gen 38:2.

[13]kaì ōrgísthē (καὶ ὠργίσθη). Some scholars try to make the Hebrew tradition fit this reading either by positing that the Hebrew verb is derived from Akkadian *zenū*, which means "to get mad," or that theHebrew word is *zānaḥ* (זָנַח), which means "reject" or "spurn."

[14]The phrase is: לְדַבֵּר עַל־לִבָּהּ/*lᵉdabbēr ʿal-libbāh*. There is a problem with "to bring her back" (לְהָשִׁיבָו/*lahăšîbāû*) in that the feminine suffix is missing. The Qere is: להשיבה/lhšybh. I refer to the husband in this instance as Hosea-like in that this prophet famously wooed an unfaithful wife, at YHWH's behest no less (Hosea 1–3). In Hosea 2:16 (Eng 2:14) the exact Hebrew phrase is used to describe the prophet's wooing of his unfaithful so as to be married to her once again. Of course, in this prophetic book Hosea is a figure for YHWH, his promiscuous wife is sinful, covenant-breaking Israel.

hospitality is odd: "He pressed him" (JPS) or "He strongly insisted" (19:4). Even if we let this pass as unbridled exuberance in that he was unusually fond of his son-in-law or, more likely, that another man would soon have the responsibility of feeding his daughter, or even that grandchildren were soon to be once again on the horizon, there are other cautionary notes. For example, the purpose for the Levite's journey—to speak tenderly to his disaffected partner and convince her to return home—is all but forgotten in the five-day eating and drinking extravaganza which ensues (19:4–9). The silence that was curious when the couple first met outside the home becomes conspicuous. Not only that, it is uncertain that the woman participated in table fellowship with the men. Pointedly, the narrator stresses once that "the *two* of them sat, ate, and drank together" (19:6) and once that "the *two* of them ate together" (19:8). Only the grammar in v4 can be construed to give the woman a seat at the table, and that is confined to the first three days. The impression is that the the woman has been shunted into the background. Indeed, having so recently been the subject of verbs indicating purposive if not astonishing action, it seems odd that in the several days at her father's house she is the subject of no verbs whatsoever. During these days the woman seems to be devoured along with the rest of the food and drink.[15] Even the reason for the party in the first place is downplayed, for after re-entering her father's house we are reminded of her presence exclusively with references to "the father of the young woman" (19:4, 5, 6, 8, 9). Only on the last day, when the father's efforts to keep his guests around indefinitely finally fail, is she called "his young woman," meaning the Levite's spouse (19:9).

What are we to make of this? Certainly, the woman's father is the epitome of a gracious host. His hospitality knows no bounds. The Levite barely manages to extricate himself late in the afternoon of the fifth day even though he tried to leave initially on the morning of the fourth day (19:5). But is this gracious hospitality or excessive hospitality? Presumably, hospitality exists for guests rather than the other way round. Surely hospitality moves from being gracious and welcome to uncomfortable if not oppressive when the recepient is kept from important business. The Levite needed to speak to his concubine and begin the work of reconciliation, and the two of them had to get home where they could restart their marriage on a more solid footing. Before the Levite entered this home we were primed to witness something that was potentially groundbreaking for an Old Testament story: a wronged husband wanting his unfaithful woman back and willing to speak tenderly to her to make that happen. Alas, all we get to witness is nonstop revelry while we imagine growing piles of dirty dishes.

The Fateful Journey Home

Due to the father's overweening hospitality, it is late in the day before the Levite manages to set out for home with his concubine and servant (Jud 19:9–10). If we thought the trip back would afford the couple a chance to talk, we are mistaken. There is nary a word. As well, the woman's relationship to the traveling party on the journey back is troubling since the man is the subject of the verbs of locomotion whereas the concubine and the two donkeys are merely "with him" (19:10). Disconcertingly, she is included with the livestock. When the group reaches Jebus, that is, Jerusalem, the silence is at last broken, but by an unexpected actor: the young servant. He suggests booking lodging in Jebus because it is so late (19:11), an idea the Levite immediately squelches. Why? Because Jebus is a foreign city. The implication is that Israelites could not count on foreigners to be hospitable. Late or not, they will continue on to the Israelite town of Gibeah, or perhaps Ramah (19:12–13). Anything but Jebus would be fine, as long as it is Israelite. By nightfall they arrive at Gibeah of Benjamin (19:14). In all this time the Levite and his concubine have still said nothing to each other.

Plopping themselves down in the village square, apparently hoping to attract attention and maybe wrangle an invitation, they rouse no one (19:15). Having just that morning left behind five full days of effusive hospitality, these wayfarers find themselves in an Israelite town that does not so much as notice their presence. Their luck changes however when an old man returning from his work late happens upon them. The man is an Ephraimite who is himself a visitor in Gibeah. The narrator reminds us that the town is Benjaminite even though we know that from v14. Why does this bear repeating? Was the city

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[15]See Ng, Andrew Hock-Soon, "Revisiting Judges 19: A Gothic Perspective," *JSOT* 32/2 (2007): 206–212.

notoriously unfriendly? Was this a dangerous area to be outdoors and unguarded at night? Did Benjaminites have an unsavory reputation?

In any case, the old man strikes up a conversation and learns that the Levite is on his way home. As the Levite explains his circumstance, he adds an anomalous statement, " . . . and now I am going to the House of YHWH." This comes out of the blue.

Commentators typically adopt the reading of the Septuagint (Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures) here, in which the Levite says simply that he is on the way home.[16] Yet, as incongruous as it is for the Levite to indicate that he is headed for the "House of YHWH," regardless of what location that might suggest, we should not be too hasty in rejecting it. The statement plays a most interesting role by accenting religious devotion. The Levite subtly makes himself out to be a God-fearing, temple-attending Israelite.[17] If an ordinary Israelite deserves hospitality in an Israelite city, then an exemplar of Israelite piety should be even more deserving.

The Levite makes no bones about his disappointment that no offer of lodging has been forthcoming even though the group is self-sufficient (19:19). Finally, upon hearing the Levite's complaints, the old man tenders an invitation (19:20). The trio accepts the generosity and heads for the man's dwelling where animals are grained, feet are washed, and a meal is served. To some extent, this old man has saved Gibeah's reputation (19:21).

All this changes when the people safe inside the old man's house are suddenly disturbed by an unexpected pounding on the door. The intruders are referred to as "the men of the city, worthless men . . . " JPS aptly translates: "a depraved lot." Make no mistake, these are not mischievous youths set on an impish prank calculated to rattle nerves. These are execrable street toughs who demand that the old man deliver the Levite to them so that they can possess him sexually (19:22). Now we realize that the visitors had not gone unnoticed in the town square—they were being watched, so closely that their whereabouts were known. Gibeah has collectively committed a sin of omission by not offering hospitality. But these awful men are about to commit an egregious sin of commission. It does not escape our attention that the only other place in the Bible where something like this is described is Sodom (Genesis 19).[18] Alas, Gibeah, an Israelite city in which any Israelite should be able to count on hospitality, is indistinguishable from notoriously perfidious Sodom.

What transpires in Gibeah is actually worse than Sodom, since in the latter the rape was prevented (Gen 19:10–11). The scene in Gibeah is all but indescribable. At first, the old man stands his ground, begging for these lowlifes to come to their senses. He implores the hooligans to appreciate his responsibity as a host (Jud 19:23). The man's fortitude is remarkable in that the intruders were intent on homosexual rape; thus, he might himself have fallen victim to their lust. But our admiration for the man's courage instantly morphs into revulsion. Before the mob respond to the man's pleas, he makes a counter offer: leave my male guest alone and instead satisfy yourselves with either my virgin daughter or his concubine. Heartlessly, he says: "Let me deliver them to you; then do to them what you will."[19] In the end, the old man pleads that these men forego only the folly of homosexual rape (19:24). Raping one woman, or two women, is somehow less heinous.

The next part is confusing. The text says, "So the man seized his concubine and thrust [her] out to them" (19:25). Which man is the subject of the verb? Supposedly, it is the old man, for he is the last to have spoken. But the woman is not "his concubine." Had the Levite entered the fray and pushed his woman outside? Or, is there an intentional ambiguity to insure that we assign equal blame? Answers elude us, but in a way it does not matter: the Levite's concubine is thrown to the wolves. The virgin daughter recedes from the episode and is not spoken of again. It is a small mercy.

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[16]For example, see Robert G. Boling, *Judges* (Anchor Bible, 6A; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975): 275.

[17]Typically, the verb used for going to the temple is עָלָה/*ʿālāh*, "to go up." But the verb הָלַךְ/*hālak* does occur, as for example in Psalm 122:1.

[18]Most scholars see Genesis 19 and Judges 19 as portraying the same "type scene."

[19]Literally: " . . . do to them what is right in your eyes." This, of course, evokes the full formulae about there being no king in those days, when every one did what was right in their own eyes. This is an explicit example of that very thing.

The gang rape goes on all night. In the morning, the despicable perpetrators toss aside their victim as so much trash.[20] Incredibly, the woman manages after this atrocity to crawl back to the door of the house where the menfolk are inside, safe, sound, and completely insulated from the barbarity in which they had been complicit (19:25). Neither the Levite nor his host were huddled at the door waiting for the first chance to retrieve the woman. Instead, on that dreadful morning the woman's husband got up and opened the doors in preparation for continuing his journey home (19:26). It is as though nothing out of the ordinary had taken place, instead of the blackest of days that would live in biblical infamy. Did the Levite not know what the old man had done? Could the husband have been that obtuse? Had the old man been too ashamed or afraid to tell him? What if it had been the Levite who shoved the woman outside? Had he and his host then gone casually to bed? Did they have no conscience whatsoever? These questions overwhelm as they cry out for answers. We are in the presence of incalculable evil.

At this point, something happens that was supposed to happen when the Levite first saw his alienated spouse (19:3). The man at long last speaks to his concubine, though certainly not "to her heart." Seeing her lying at the door gripping the threshhold, the man coldly says, "Get up. Let's go." In agonizing understatement, the narration says simply: "There was no answer" (19:27–28). As the journey resumes, the woman has become little more than cargo as she is loaded on the donkey for the return trip.

Arriving home, the man grabs a knife and cuts up his concubine into twelve pieces. Each of these he then sends throughout Israel, one part for each Israelite unit (19:29). While we are still reeling from the lurid account and trying to deal with the macabre dispersing of the woman's body, something occurs to us that makes us recoil to the depths of our souls: We were never told that the woman was already dead when the man butchered her. Shock overloads our emotional ability to absorb this horrendous datum.

The only mitigating element in this whole sordid mess is Israel's reaction. With a blanket statement we hear Israel lament that the savagery to which this woman's divided body testifies is unprecedented. There is no attempt to cover up or to offer excuses—Israel is well aware that they must respond decisively (19:30).

Israel's Administration of Justice

As the story proceeds, it is no longer local. It involves more than a couple, a father-in-law, a small traveling party and an old man, a small town and a gang of rapists. Israel as a whole is now center stage. The collective gathering is boldly underscored with redundancy: "Then *every* Israelite went forth and the *congregation*, *from Dan to Beersheba, and the land of Gilead*, assembled as *one* person at Mizpah." The officers of all the people, down to the last tribe, gathered in a congregation of God's people, including four-hundred thousand infantry" (20:1–2).[21] This cluster of words and phrases could not more emphatically juxtapose Israel as a single entity over against one of its constituent parts.

This phrasing prompts us to reconfigure the first part of the story. Looking back, we realize that in each successive scene greater division obtains. First a married couple separates, then division affects the woman's family during the five day feasting frenzy. There is a divide between an Israelite town and Israelite wayfarers, made all the more conspicuous by the old man's role. The worst division of all is

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[20]The three verbs of which the concubine is the object during that night are: "they had sex with" (וַיֵּדְעוּ/wayyēdᵉʿû), "they abused" (וַיִּתְעַלְלוּ/wayyiṯʿallᵉlû), and "they tossed aside" (וַיְשַׁלְּחוּהָ/wayᵉšallᵉḥûhā).

[21]A number of words and phrases put Israel as a collective in bold relief: "all the Israelites" (כָּל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל/kol-bᵉnê Yiśrāʾēl); "the entire congregation" (הָעֵדָה/hāʿēdāh); "assembled as one person" (וַתִּקָּהֵל כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד/wattiqqāhēl kᵉʾîš ʾeḥād); "from Dan to Beersheba and the land of Gilead" (לְמִדָּן וְעַד־בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע וְאֶרֶץ הַגִּלְעָד/lᵉmiddān wᵉʿad-beʾēr šᵉbaʿ wᵉʾereṣ haggilʿād); "the officers of all the people" (פִּנּוֹת כָּל־הָעָם/kol-hāʿām); "all the tribes of Israel" (כָּל שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל/ kol-šibṭê Yiśrāʾēl); "gathered themselves in a congregation of the people of God" (וַיִּתְיַצְּבוּ בִּקְהַל עַם הָאֱלֹהִים/wayyityaṣṣᵉbû biqhal ʿam hāʾĕlōhîm). For ease of rendering into English, I have altered the word order of the Hebrew in places. These all appear in Judges 20:1–2. It is interesting to note that standard critical commentaries have taken notice of the ecclesial language used in this section, something that has been taken as redactional and therefore as evidence of a late date of composition. I have no quarrel with that, but simply call to attention that in the final canonical form of the text there is no mistaking the presentation of Israel as, in the words of Moore, " . . . a church instead of a people or a nation . . . " See George F. Moore, *Judges* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1895): 404.

between the folk who thought they were safe in the old man's home and the townsmen who acted so abominably. All of these divisions are subsequently represented in a most ghastly manner when the Levite dismembers his concubine. Ironically, it is this last gruesome division that is the catalyst for Israel's collective, communal appearance. At the breaking point, the many has become one.

There is a twist, however. Israel is not quite one. Benjamin, whose town offered atrocity rather than hospitality, is not included in the Israelite gathering even though they, too, assemble at Mizpah. At one level, this is a dislocation in the narrative structure.[22] At another level, Benjamin is in a position to overhear Israel questioning the Levite as a prelude to exacting justice. No matter how unified Israel appears to be, its seams are showing.

With Benjamin, we get to overhear the Levite when Israel asks him: "How did this evil thing happen?" (20:3b). The man tells the awful story, though he spins it to deflect personal culpability. He acknowledges that he and his concubine arrived at Gibeah to spend the night and that some of Gibeah's menfolk attempted to get their clutches on him, but settled on brutalizing his concubine. However, he sidesteps any criticism. He omits the part about the old man, including the offer of women. Nor is he forthcoming about how the concubine ended up outside. Even more telling, he lets on that the woman died during the rape, something which the narration does not confirm (20:4–5). He does tell the truth about the dismemberment and he aptly refers to the deed as wanton folly as he demands redress of grievance (20:6–7). Still, not even the man's self-serving testimony keeps us from wanting these thugs to get their due.

A measure of sanity is injected as Israel resolves to make the administration of justice their priority (20:8). The accent remains on Israel's unity. The Levite had alluded to it: "Since you are all Israelites . . . " (20:7). Then, in 20:8 they "rose as a single person" to declare their intentions and finally in 20:11 "all the Israelites deployed against the city, united as a single person."[23] With the spotlight on unity, the story clarifies that the punishment Israel has devised is proportionate. While deployed against Gibeah, Israel sends representatives throughout Benjamin to request that they hand over the guilty party. The penalty is harsh—death—but only the perpetrators are targeted. If Benjamin complies, not only will the appropriate punishment be applied, but Israel's unity will be further strengthened. After all, Benjamin is an integral part of Israel. Tragically, Benjamin responds tribally rather than communally. Regardless of the relationship to Israel, Benjamin refuses the community's demand (20:13).[24] Sadly, Benjamin has sided with the criminals for no other reason than that they are Benjaminites.

Benjamin's insular actions notwithstanding, Israel persists in doing the right thing. To be sure, Benjamin's behavior has made Israel's task more difficult, but surely God will stand with the administrators of justice in this instance. In fact, even though Benjamin is hopelessly outnumbered, Israel still elicit God's help (20:14–18). For the first time in this story, someone decides to consult God. It is about time. As adverse to any more violence as we might be, we are hardly conflicted that Israel represents the "good guys" over against the Benjaminite "bad guys." Apparently YHWH agrees, for the deity answers Israel's question about who should engage Benjamin first with the words, "Judah first" (20:18). The outcome seems all but guaranteed.

But we are wrong, for Benjamin decisively wins the encounter (20:19–21). This makes no sense. What could possible justify Benjamin's victory? Plus, what are we to make of YHWH's instruction? No answers present themselves before there is a second battle, with the same outcome. Israel suffered fewer casualties this time around, but was nevertheless soundly beaten (20:25). Adding insult to this injury, prior to this ignominious outcome Israel had pled with God, weeping all day and into the evening before inquiring of God whether to re-engage Benjamin. There is no mistaking YHWH's answer: "Go up against them" (20:22–23). Was Almighty God teasing Israel? Had God become a jokester? Was a holy and righteous God willing to allow the men of Gibeah to go unpunished?

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[22]Verse 3a seems to belong as the introduction to 20:14.

[23]20:7 (הִנֵּה כֻלְּכֶם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל/hinnēh kullᵉkem bᵉnê Yiśrāʾēl); 20:8 (וַיָּקָם כָּל־הָעָם כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד/wayyāqom kol-hāʿām kᵉʾîš ʾeḥād); 20:11 (וַיֵּאָסֹף כָּל־אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־הָעִיר כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד חֲבֵרִים/wayyāsēp kol-ʾîš Yiśrāʾēl ʾel-hāʿîr keʾîš ʾeḥād ḥăbērîm).

[24]Once again redundant language puts the stress on Israel's unity: "But Benjamin did not want to listen to the voice of Israel, their kinfolk, the Israelites" (וְלֹא אָבוּ בִנְיָמִן לִשְׁמֹעַ בְּקוֹל אֲחֵיהֶם בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל/wᵉlōʾ ʾābû Binyāmīn lišmōaʿ bᵉqôl ʾăḥêhem bᵉnê-Yiśrāʾēl).

The answers to these troubling questions emerge when Israel approaches YHWH for the third time. Only then do we realize that there has been a pattern in the approach to God, one revealing that Israel has forgotten how to communicate with their deity. The first time Israel sought God, "They got up and went up to God's House and asked God . . . "(20:18). Going to a temple is appropriate enough.[25] But Israel uses the generic "God" instead of YHWH in their request (וַיָּקֻמוּ וַיַּעֲלוּ בֵּית־אֵל וַיִּשְׁאֲלוּ בֶאלֹהִים/wayyāqūmû wayyă'lû bêt-'ēl wayyiš'ălû bē'lōhîm). All YHWH says in response to this request is "Judah first." The reason why that is a worrisome answer will be clear momentarily.

The second time Israel inquires of the deity their approach is preceded by weeping "before YHWH" all day and into the evening. This appears to signal an increase in Israel's openness to YHWH. In addition to weeping "before YHWH," they direct their question to YHWH as well. Also, instead of asking who should deploy first they ask whether "we," meaning all of Israel, should march against Benjamin. YHWH says, in effect, "yes" (20:23). Once more, however, God's response is confusing in light of Israel's second reversal.

The third time Israel approaches YHWH the mystery is solved. On this go-around the whole of Israel—"all Israel" (כָּל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל/kol-bᵉnê Yiśrā'ēl) and "all the troops" (וְכָל־הָעָם/wᵉkol-hā'ām)—goes up to God's house where they weep, "sit before YHWH," fast, and present offerings "before YHWH" (20:26).[26] Israel has their liturgical, religious, and theological house in order when they approach YHWH this third time. Not surprisingly, YHWH's answer on this occasion is more fulsome: "Go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your hand" (20:27–28). That response recalls Judges 1, when Israel for the very first time asked YHWH who should deploy first against the Canaanites. The answer then was, "Judah should go up for I have given the land into his hand" (1:2). There follows a string of Israelite victories (1:4–5, 8–10, 11–13, , 17, 18–19, 22–25).[27]

As it turns out, "all Israel" had been neglectful of YHWH, such that it took a while before they could appeal to their God properly or recall how to hear the divine voice. In that state, even the solemn task of administering justice to a renegade rabble in their midst had been delayed. Finally, Israel is able to be an instrument of judgment and justice in God's hands. Benjamin now receives just due for protecting those awful men from Gibeah (20:29–48). So much carnage could have been avoided had Benjamin been reasonable from the beginning by turning over the guilty. A truly unified Israel would not have been so badly rent asunder—Benjamin caused a catastrophically deep division of God's people.

Multiplying Division

Though difficult to imagine, the situation gets worse. We discover that prior to the move against Benjamin Israel had vowed not to allow their daughters to marry Benjaminites (21:1, 5b–7). While this pledge was perfectly understandable given the circumstances, the unintended consequence is that Benjamin stood on the brink of extinction. Only six hundred males remained after their defeat. The oath would now prevent the Benjaminites from rebuilding their tribe with Israelite women. Foreign women were not an option (Josh 23:12–13). Once again Israel weeps bitterly before God at God's House as they plaintively ask YHWH how it could have happened that they are on the verge of being bereft of an entire tribe (Jud 21:2–3). Israel had set out to purge one small group of evildoers, but ended up inadvertently endangering a whole tribe. Equally ironic, Benjamin had responded tribally to preserve themselves, an action that had the opposite effect.

Israel's solution to the dilemma derives from the realization that the town of Jabesh-Gilead had not participated in Israel's effort against Benjamin. This is bad news in that it shows Israel had not been

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[25]One should think of a local temple here rather than the well-known city Bethel. See Boling, *Judges*, 285.

[26]It may be pertinent that a frame-break informs us that the Ark of the Covenant was there in those days with Phineas, a priest related to Aaron (20:27).

[27]Judah's only failure was not of their own making, but had to do with the difficulty of overcoming those who had iron chariots (1:19). The only other victory in those early days—with the possible exception of Caleb's driving out the Anakites (1:20)—belonged to the House of Joseph because "YHWH was with them," perhaps as YHWH had been with their eponymous ancestor (1:22–25; see Gen 39:2–3, 21, 23). The other failures (Jud 1:21, 27, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34) seem to be related to Israel's lapsing into idolatry (2:1–5, 11–15).

as unified as first thought, but good news in that these folk had not taken the oath. However, Jabesh-Gilead's non-participation is such a violation of Israelite unity that it is now subject to "the ban" or "proscription," something to which the Canaanites as a whole were liable in the Book of Joshua. Like the Canaanites, the population of Jabesh-Gilead now suffers the same fate (Jud 21:10–11). Once again, the effects of Israel's disunity cannot be contained as a whole town is eliminated. The only ones who are spared are four hundred virgins who may now be married off to the remaining Benjaminite men (21:12–14). While we are still reeling at an Israelite action that wipes out a town to save a tribe there is another bizarre twist. Benjamin is two hundred women shy of having enough Israelite wives. For reasons that pass understanding, no one seems to think that Benjamin could have started over with four hundred couples. Somehow, six hundred were requisite. If this is not a Gothic tale, it should be.[28]

What Israel concocts to make up for this shortfall is patently absurd. It so happens that an annual religious feast at Shiloh is underway. A feast means celebration, and celebration means dancing maidens. Israel therefore instructs the remaining wife-less Benjamites to hide out in the vineyards until the dancing women appear. When the moment is opportune, the men are to seize any women to their liking and make off with them. Should brothers or fathers complain, Israel will justify this brazen behavior with the most ridiculous of justifications, namely, that at least the Benjaminites did not spirit the women away in a military confrontation. Israel will also explain that they did not have enough women to supply Benjamin and, as a bonus, the folk at Shiloh cannot be charged with violating the oath about not giving daughters to the Benjaminites because the women were in fact stolen rather than given (21:20–22). This would be hilarious were it not so tragic. The Benjaminites follow their orders, steal their wives, and a tribe is saved. The story concludes as it began, except that in light of the episode's content, it is fitting that the full formula be cited: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (21:25).

Interpreting Figurally

In light of this formulaic framing, the interpretive implications for this episode seem straightforward. Without a monarchy, Israel will be prone to other incidents in which the social fabric is ripped to shreds because of the unrestrained depravity of a few. A unified Israel would be immune from dark moments like this one, but unity requires a king. Had the crown's soldiers been patrolling Gibeah's streets that awful night, none of this would have happened. When crimes were committed, swift and severe royal justice would punish the offenders and act as a deterrent for future miscreants. Monarchies have flaws, but they promote stability. Surely law and order would be preferable to what was witnessed at Gibeah and its awful aftermath?

Affirming this analysis, ideological critics argue that stories like the one found in Judges 19–21 were written to convince Israelites that a strong monarchy was necessary to avoid social chaos.[29] The reasoning goes that no sensible Israelite would be more frightened of the royal court than situations in which Israelites are left to tear themselves asunder without restraint.

The ideological critics may have a point. But Judges 19—21 no longer is an isolated narrative with a singular socio-political application. The story is now part of Judges, which is part of Former Prophets, which is part of the Old Testament, which is part of Christian Scripture, which consists of Old and New Testaments. That canonical arrangement alters everything. It changes the way we interpret the last three chapters of Judges and it changes the way we interpret kingship.

Relative to the Old Testament context, two things need to be kept in mind. One is that Israel is depicted as either divided or threatened with division ever since entering into a covenant relationship with YHWH (Exodus 20—Num 10:10).[30] For example, Joshua 22 recounts the time when "the whole assembly

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[28]This is precisely how Andrew Hock-Soon Ng takes the story. See "Revisiting Judges 19."

[29]Gale Yee uses this particular pericope (along with the previous narrative) to illustrate the validity of ideological criticism. See "Ideological Criticism: Judges 17—21 and the Dismembered Body," in *Judges & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Gale A. Yee, ed.; 2nd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007): 138–160.

[30]Even in the ancestral period (Genesis 12—50) there are significant fault lines in the family which God has chosen as Israel's precursor. E.g., the rivalry between Esau and Jacob is legendary, even though it was the means through which YHWH put forward Jacob as the "child of promise." See Frank Anthony Spina, "The 'Face of God': Esau in

of the people of Israel" gathered at Shiloh to square off against Reuben, Gad and the transjordanian half of Manasseh over the building of an altar that the larger segment of Israel feared was idolatrous and would bring divine judgment on the whole nation.[31] But the transjordanian group insisted that their altar was not only not idolatrous, but was erected expressly to prevent a permanent division in Israel and to maintain unity in spite of the fact that the larger group and the smaller group were separated literally and symbolically by a river. Israel is badly divided also when Abimelech, the son of Gideon, pits one portion of Israel against the other by unilaterally installing himself as king, a positiion based entirely on fraticide and intimidation (Judges 9).

Presumably, in the first instance Israel would have avoided the misunderstanding had there been centralized monarchial control and in the second instance the blame should be placed squarely on Abimelech's twisted thinking and despicable tactics. Thus, the formulae which frame the concubine story—and the previous account—could still be credited with making a valid point.

But given the way the story of Israel's monarchy unfolds we have to rethink the matter. The unpalatable fact is this: Not only was Israel's monarchy unable to maintain Israel's unity, throughout Former Prophets it is accused of being the main cause of a divided state. Israel enjoyed a precarious unity only during the relatively brief periods of Saul and David (1 Samuel 8—1 Kings 2).[32] Solomon, the third king, was the last to rule a united Israel and the one most responsible for the schism under his son Rehoboam from which the community never recovered.[33] Post Rehoboam, Israel's most marked characteristic is division.[34]

The prominence of this division is what led many Christian interpreters to see a fractured Christian church as figured by Israel. Indeed, what would have been more natural than seeing the Church's various divisions as mirroring those of God's community?[35] But an interpretive move along these lines, while cogent from one perspective, has an inherent difficulty from another. The problem involves a theological stance in which by definition the Church cannot experience true disunity because it is the Body of Christ. Christ's body can be only one body, not many. In this vein, Cyprian argued that Ahijah's torn cloak, which symbolized the rending of Israel into two (1 Kgs 11:29–32), could not be figurally transferred to the Church. The more apt figure for the Church, he insisted, was Jesus' seamless robe and the soldiers' refusal to tear it (Jn 19:23–24).[36]

Such a view of the Church's unity, reflecting nothing less than the unity of the triune God (Jn 17:21), either requires one to use Israel's division as a figure for another kind of disunity or, more

Canonical Context," in *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders* (Craig A. Evans and Shemaryahu Talmon, eds.; Biblical Interpretation Series, 28; Leiden, New York, Cologne: Brill, 1997): 3–25. See also by the same author, "Esau: The Face of God," in *The Faith of the Outsider*, 14–34.

[31]See Josh 22:12: וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקָּהֲלוּ כָל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁלֹה לַעֲלוֹת עֲלֵיהֶם לִצְבָא/wayyišm^{e}ûû b^{e}nê Yiśrā'ēl wayyiqqahălû kol-'ădat b^{e}nê-Yiśrā'ēl Šīlōh la'ălôt 'ălêhem lassābā'.

[32]Even David rules initially while members of the Saulide dynasty remained in control over some parts of Israel. See 2 Sam 3:1.

[33]See Frank Anthony Spina, "*In* But Not *of* the World: The Confluence of Wisdom and Torah in the Solomon Story (1 Kings 1—11)," *The Asbury Theological Journal* [Robert Lyon *Festschrift* Volume] 56/1 (2001): 17–30. The story of division actually takes place upon the accession of Solomon's son Rehoboam, whose refusal to alter the oppressive policies of his father and dismissal of the demands of the deputation led by Jeroboam precipitated division.

[34]At times israel and Judah unify as allies (e.g. 1 Kings 22), but organic unity never obtains after Rehoboam.

[35]See the voluminous bibliography in Ephraim Radner, *The End of the Church: A Pneumatology of Christian Division in the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Compare Ephraim Radner, "The Cost of Communion: A Meditation on Israel and the Divided Church," in *Inhabiting Unity: Theological Perspectives on the Proposed Lutheran-Episcopal Concordat* (Ephraim Radner & R. R. Reno, eds.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955) See also Yves M.-J. Congar, "Reflections on the Schism of Israel in the Perspective of Christian Divisions," in *Dialogue Between Christians* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966): 160–83 [originally in Proche-Orient chrétien 1 (1951)].

[36]Cyprian, *De ecclesiae catholize unitate*, c. 7. See also Raymond Himelick, trans. & ed., *Erasmus and the Seamless Coat of Jesus* (Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Studies, 1971).

commonly, to see Israel's division as characteristic of a rift between a true and a false Church.[37] This line of reasoning led to identifying one segment of the Church as true Israel and the other as apostate Israel. Typically, Judah was associated with the former, especially given its ties with David, and Israel with the latter. Calvin, for instance, viewed the doctrine of transubstantiation as comparable to the golden calves erected by Jeroboam, Israel's first king after the great rift (1 Kgs 12:25–33). As bad as Rehoboam, Judah's first king, was, he was still in the Davidic line. Calvin concluded from this that Rome has cut herself off from God's people as figured by Judah and cannot be reformed, only fled.[38] As one might imagine, in the charged atmosphere of the Reformation there were numerous folk who saw themselves as the true church, identified with David's Judah, whereas their apostate and heretical opponents represented an idolatrous non-Davidic Israel under judgment.[39]

However, this will not work biblically. The Judah–Israel dichotemy is easy to challenge, for David's dynasty under Solomon was condemned by YHWH and torn apart at the deity's instigation (1 Kgs 11:9–13). Further, all of Solomon's adversaries were raised up by YHWH (11:14, 23), who additionally sent the prophet Ahijah to announce the divine plan about dividing the kingdom as an act of judgment (11:26–39). Any in the Church who claim to represent Judah over against Israel have to deal with this inconvenient truth. At the same time, the Israel whom God used as an instrument of judgment against Judah became themselves apostate (12:25–33). The remainder of the narrative in 1—2 Kings after the schism condemns both kingdoms equally. Most decisive of all is the fact that Israel and Judah suffer the same ultimate fate: exile (2 Kings 17; 24). Therefore, to the extent that the Church of Jesus Christ is to be seen as a figure of Israel the whole divided Church remains under condemnation.

In sum, not only did the monarchy do little to keep Israel unified, it was most responsible for disunity. This datum in turn impels us to reconsider the nature of biblical kingship. Relative to assessing the significance of the formulae which frame Judges 19—21, the issue revolves on what sort of kings are in mind. Further, the matter cannot be settled by considering whether a particular king is "good" or "bad." The very nature of the kingship being envisioned is what matters. Indeed, all of Former Prophets demonstrates that conventional kingship, that is, one "like all the other nations" (1 Sam 8:4–5), will have a deleterious effect on Israel. Exile proves that.

The sort of king appropriate to YHWH's elect people is described in Deuteronomy 17:14–20, which calls for the king to forego conventional military, political, and monetary strength and instead embrace Torah, which he is to read and enact continually. In the latter activity, the king is to embody a righteous Israel. For Israel and any future king, the words of Torah—meaning words which are inclusive of Israel's comprehensive traditions of election and covenant—are to be on the heart, taught to the children, spoken of wherever one happens to be, bound as a sign on the hand, situated as frontlets between the eyes, and written on the doorposts of houses and gates (Deut 6:6–9). Such obedience is also constitutive of wisdom. Again, in Deuteronomy, a passage admonishing thorough and far-reaching obedience concludes by saying, "for this is your wisdom and your understanding in peoples' eyes" (Deut 4:6). No king is depicted more prominently as combining Torah and wisdom than Solomon.[40] Yet, even in his case, Solomon finally attenuates Torah and uses wisdom for acquisitive and self-aggrandizing purposes (1 Kings 1—11). In the end, the only king whom the tradition valorizes and to whom it looks forward is the ideal David, the one who is completely obedient and blamelessly follows Torah (2 Sam 22:21–25).[41] Once the ideal David is projected into the eschatological future, that king becomes the basis

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[37]Origen, for example, connects the division of Israel with the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in Romans 9—11. See his "Homily IV on Jeremiah 3:6–11."

[38]Cited by Radner, *The End of the Church*, 206. See also Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and Pierre Nicole, *De l'unité de l'église ou réfutation du nouveau systême de M. Jurieu* (Luxembourg, 1727): 282–89.

[39]References are replete in Radner, *The End of the Church*.

[40]See Spina, "*In* But Not *Of* the World." On the combination of Torah and wisdom see the work of G. T. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: A Study in the Sapientializing of the Old Testament* (BZAW, 151; Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980).

[41]Second Samuel 21—24, long considered an appendix and an interruption to the so-called Succession Narrative (2 Samuel 9—1 Kings 2), is actually key to how the tradition renders David. In these chapters David is first *deconstructed* by showing him without conventional strength or ability. Then, his pastoral and mediatorial roles are

for Israel's rescue from exile and their ultimate hope.

It goes without saying that the New Testament presents Jesus not only in the line of but as the ultimate David, as the embodiment of Torah obedience and its fulfillment, and as one endowed with wisdom from above.[42] In addition, the four Gospel tradition consistently puts Jesus forward as Israel's messiah, that is, Christ, and Israel's king.[43] Also, in the spirit of Deuteronomy 17, Jesus, as Israel's kings were admonished, in the temptation stories categorically rejects power, wealth, and status as a function of his mission .[44] From a New Testament perspective, Jesus is everything that Israel's kings were to have been.

This same Jesus prays for the unity of his disciples and all others who eventually follow him. It is a powerful prayer with startling implications: "Not only for them do I pray, but also for those who believe in me through their word, in order that all might be one just as you, Father, are in me as I am in you, so that they might be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me" (Jn 17:20–21).[45] This is the quintessential connection between Jesus the Christ, Son of David, Israel's messiah and king, and the elect community of God which fulfills its mission, calling, and the divine will by being one. In St. Paul's words, "There is one Body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all . . . " (Eph 4:4–5).

This is the oneness that is to typify the Church and the same oneness that was to be exemplified in God's people Israel. But Israel was divided, hopelessly so, a prime illustration of which is found in the story of the Levitite's concubine. A king was needed to prevent division on this scale, but Israel's kings precipitated rather than prevented division. Now, howerver, with Jesus as king, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, such unity becomes a glorious possibility under the grace and power of God. This is the King for whom the community has waited.

Except for this terrible reality: the Church of Jesus Christ, the Body of Christ, the "*one* holy, catholic, and apostolic" church, is as divided as her type and figure Israel. The seamless garment has been torn. Christians today inhabit a divided Church. Arguably, it is more divided than it has ever been, and teeters on the verge of yet more division. Israel, at least, had the virtue of being divided into two. The Church, however, as in the concubine pericope, exists in multiple divisions. For all the value of Protestantism and its efforts to reform a Church that needed reforming, the centrifugal pressure to atomize and break off into more pieces not only continues but seems diabolically to gather energy. Keep in mind that we are not talking about trivial differences. We are talking about the inability for all brothers and sisters in Christ, all the saints, to sit at the Lord's table and partake of one bread and one cup.

emphasized. In the poetic segments, an ideal David is presented, that is, one who obeyed God implicitly and perfectly. For the "ideal David" see the following: Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979): 273–75; Walter Brueggemann, "2 Samuel 21–24: An Appendix of Deconstruction?," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50/3 (1988): 383–97; Frank Anthony Spina, "1 and 2 Samuel," in the *Asbury Bible Commentary* (E. Carpenter and W. McCown, eds.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992): 384-86.

[42]On Jesus as the Son of David, as the inheritor of David's kingdom, or as greater than David see the following: Mt 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9, 15; 22:42; Mk 10:47–48; 11:10; 12:35–37; Lk 1:32–33, 69; 18:38–39; 20:41–44; Jn 7:42. On Jesus and wisdom see the following: Mt 12:42; 13:54; Mk 6:2; Lk 2:40, 52; 7:35; 11:31, 49; 21:15. Also, while the relationship is complex, Jesus is connected to wisdom sayings in the Book of James. Generally, Jesus is shown as respectful of the law (Greek νόμος/nomos is equivalent to Hebrew תּוֹרָה/tôrāh) and as one who has insight into its deepest principies: Mt 5:17–18; 7:12; 11:13; 12:5; 15:6; 22:36, 40; 23:23. In Luke Jesus' parents are shown being sensitive to the law's requirements (2:22, 23, 24, 27, 39); elsewhere, Jesus is deferential to the law (10:26; 16:16–17; 24:44). In John there is perhaps a more ambiguous understanding (1:17; 8:5, 17); still, Jesus remains senstive to the law (1:45; 7:19, 23, 49, 51; 10:34; 15:25).

[43]Jesus is referred to as king by both supporters and, sarcastically or critically, by detractors. See Mt 2:2; 21:5; 25:34 (the king doing the judging is the Son of Man [v31]), 40; 27:11, 29, 37, 42; Mk 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32; Lk 19:38; 23:2, 3, 37, 38; Jn 1:49; 6:15; 12:13, 15; 18:33–34, 37, 39; 19:3, 12, 14, 15, 19, 21. The title *Christ* is applied to Jesus throughout the Gospels. See the confessional scenes in Mt 16:13–23; Mk 8:27–33; Lk 9:18–22.

[44]Mt 4:1–11; Lk 4:1–13.

[45]The encylical of Pope John Paul II on modern ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint* (May 5, 1995), takes its title from this passage.

According to Christ's prayer in the Gospel of John, this has the effect of undercutting the world's ability to believe that he has been sent by God. Is there a more serious dilemma bedeviling the Church?

I conclude by returning one final time to the story in Judges and especially the dual symbolic value of the concubine. Her actions generated the first small-scale division but later was acted on in such a way that she represented the possibility of Israel's healing and reunification. In effect, her body was broken for Israel in that her dismemberment was a possible catalyst for Israel's rememberment. In that light, we cannot avoid standing in numbed silence, heads bowed, devastated by the thought that her grotesquely dismembered, divided, broken body did not accomplish the intended effect. Instead, her broken body tragically potentiated the impulses for division in Israel, leading, as we saw, to a multiplication of divisions in which each rupture was greater and deeper than the previous one.[46]

There was no compelling reason why the initial division between the woman and her husband had to grow. Had the man immediately spoken tenderly to her as he had planned, the situation in her home might have turned out differently. Had the woman's father thought first of his guests rather than his own interests, his hospitality would not have been so excessive as to prevent a timely departure. Had the inhabitants of Gibeah thought of themselves first as God's people Israel, the traveling party would not have been in the square that night hoping for a welcome. Had the thugs in Gibeah thought of themselves first as God's elect, the depraved plot they were intent on carrying out would never had been hatched. Had the two men in the house thought first of what it means to be part of YHWH's covenant community, they would have done anything, even including their own self-sacrifice, to prevent the carnage that they instead enabled. Had the Benjaminites thought first of themselves as belonging to Israel, a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6), they would have been willing to stand unified with their brothers and sisters in meting out appropriate punishment and the community would have remained intact. In that scenario, the woman's broken body would have resulted in the community's restored Body. She would have functioned as a sacrament.

Jesus, the son of David, Israel's messiah, and king, even before experiencing his own broken body on the cross, willingly and purposefully divided it among his disciples sacramentally when he offered his own flesh and blood in the bread and wine to his disciples during the Paschal meal (Mt 26:26–29; Mk 14:22–25; Lk 22:14–20; 1 Cor 11:23–26). In the course of time Christ's church instituted the *remembering* of that meal as an ongoing sacrament of grace and unity. Once again a broken body becomes emblematic and symbolic of the possibility of wholeness and unity. Only, in this instance One greater than the concubine is here. Still, we who are part of that Church, that Body, have grieved the Holy Spirit by not only dividing, but by multiplying divisions, with no end in sight. We have made a mockery of the divided, broken body around which we are to gather in glorious God-induced unity. We do not all sit at our Lord's table and as one partake of his body and blood. We who are to be shaped ultimately by Christ's story insist stubbornly by our arrogance, our selfish demands, our failure to repent, our insistence on our own correctness and our neigbors' corruption and error, and our inability or refusal to make the Body's unity our most urgent private and public prayer, tell the world by our actions that our faith is anemic, our belief suspect, and our commitment questionable. As we Christians are informed by our Scripture, might we henceforth allow the remembrance of that nameless woman's broken body as well as the memorial of the broken body of our matchless savior Jesus Christ lead us to pray constantly and fervently with our Lord that we no longer multiply divisions but "that [we] might become one?"

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[46]The artwork which Trible places at the beginning of her chapter on the concubine pictures a tombstone with the epitaph: "An Unnamed Woman. Concubine from Bethlehem. Her body was broken and given to many." See *Texts of Terror*, 64.